

# Before the Villa

Bronze and Iron Age pottery finds from  
Beddingham Roman Villa

by  
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Technical report 16

*Before the Villa — Bronze and Iron Age pottery finds from Beddingham Roman Villa*  
by Mike Seager Thomas  
(text commissioned by David Rudling, University of Sussex)

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### Summary

The prehistoric pottery assemblage from Beddingham Villa comprises 2163 sherds weighing nearly 13 kilograms ([Appendix 1](#)). Four periods are represented. The first, comprising a handful of Middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury sherds, should date to around 1500 BC. The second and third, consist of post Deverel-Rimbury pottery. The earlier of these belongs to the very end of the Middle Bronze Age and/ or the beginning Late Bronze Age (*hereafter* MBA/LBA) — on current dating the end of the second millennium BC; the later, sometime between this and the beginning of Early Iron Age (*hereafter* LBA) — c. 900 to 700 BC. The fourth period, consisting of six sherds in a fabric locally diagnostic of the saucepan pot tradition (Seager Thomas 2005, 106–8, fabric S), belongs to the Middle Iron Age (*hereafter* MIA) — c. 400 to 200 BC. The MBA/LBA pottery, including several large feature assemblages from possible contemporary features, was concentrated in the south eastern rooms of the villa, to the north of the roundhouse, and there was a possible concentration of LBA pottery to the west of this; otherwise pottery belonging to all three periods occurred throughout the excavated area.

The assemblage is interesting on a number of counts. The first is the composition of the MBA/LBA group. In regional terms there is nothing remarkable about it — in terms of the forms comprising it, it is a typical early post Deverel-Rimbury assemblage; but its coarse fabrics are all paralleled locally in an assemblages belonging to the preceding Deverel-Rimbury tradition. Indeed, had the group not included indisputably *post* Deverel-Rimbury feature sherds, it is very likely that much of it would have been assigned to this earlier tradition. This is of interest because it indicates a degree of technological continuity between the two traditions. The second is the distribution of the MBA/LBA and the LBA groups, which suggests a pattern of shifting settlement activity at Beddingham, and helps us to see more clearly the tangled nature of LBA pottery locally. The spatial patterning of the assemblage also raises issues about site taphonomy and has implications for the date of the roundhouse — currently dated to the Late Iron Age — and our understanding of the nature of prehistoric activity on site. All of these issues are considered in detail below.

### Middle Bronze Age/Late Bronze Age

Late Bronze Age pottery from most of southern England can be divided into three broadly sequential typological groups, post Deverel-Rimbury plainware

Fabric code	Texture			Inclusions	Sherd thickness in mm	Vessel nos.	Other diagnostic characteristics/notes
<i>CF</i>	coarse			Moderate (15%) fine sand to small pebble-size (6mm) burnt flint.	8–11	1, 13	Fingered. Obvious ring or coil building. A single sherd has a silky texture similar to some Neolithic fabrics.
<i>SMCF</i>				Sparse (5–7%) coarse sand to small pebble-size (7mm) burnt flint.	7–9	2	Fingered.
<i>MCF</i>				Sparse to moderate (7–15%) medium sand to small pebble-size (6mm) burnt flint.	5–10	4, 8, 9, 14–20	Fingered. Grades into fabric <i>MF</i> .
<i>SMCFI</i>				Sparse (7%) fine sand to small pebble-sized (5mm) burnt flint. Common (25–30%) fine glauconitic or pisolithic iron oxide sand.	7–10	none	A few unweathered sherds retain traces of burnishing.
<i>MFG</i>	medium			Sparse (7%) medium sand to granule-size (4–5mm) burnt flint. Unquantifiable medium sand to granule-size (4mm) grog.	5–9	none	Fingered. Has a similar feel to fabric <i>GS</i> and would make sense in an LBA 2 context.
<i>MF</i>				Moderate (10–15%) bi-modally sorted fine sand and granule-size (3mm) burnt flint grading into well sorted granule-size (2–3mm) burnt flint.	6	11	Fingered. Grades into fabric <i>MCF</i> .
<i>MFI</i>				Sparse to moderate (7–10%) fine sand to granule-size (3mm) burnt flint. Common (25–30%) fine glauconitic or pisolithic iron oxide sand.	5–7	none	Probably burnished or fingered.
<i>GS</i>				Sparse (5–7%) fine sand to granule-size (4mm) crushed shell. Unquantifiable medium sand to granule-size (4mm) grey and buff grog.	7	25	Fingered. Has a similar feel to fabric <i>MFG</i> . Utterly unlike fabric <i>S</i> .
<i>SMF</i>				Sparse (5–7%) fine sand to granule-size (3mm) burnt flint.	5–8	22–4	Fingered.
<i>S</i>				Common (20–25%) fine sand to granule-size (4mm) crushed shell.	7–9	none	Some burnished sherds. Utterly unlike fabric <i>GS</i> .
<i>FMF</i>			fine	Moderate to common (15–20%) fine to coarse sand-size burnt flint.	5–7	5, 21	Usually burnished. Clearly related to fabric <i>FF</i> .
<i>SFMFI</i>				Rare to sparse (2–3%) fine sand to coarse sand size (2mm) burnt flint. Common (25–30%) fine glauconitic or pisolithic iron oxide sand.	6–8	none	
<i>SFMF</i>				Sparse (3–5%) fine to coarse sand-size (2mm) burnt flint.	3	12	Burnished.
<i>FF</i>				Moderate (15%) fine to medium sand-size (1mm) burnt flint.	5	7	Burnished. Clearly related to fabric <i>FMF</i> .
<i>FFI</i>				Sparse (3%) fine to medium sand-size burnt flint (<1mm). Rare (<1%) fine to medium sand-size (1mm) shell. Common (25%) fine glauconitic or pisolithic iron oxide sand.	6	26	Burnished.

**Table 1.** Prehistoric pottery fabrics



pottery, ‘developed’ post Deverel-Rimbury plainware pottery, and decorated post Deverel-Rimbury pottery. Comprising sherds from mostly undecorated, thin-bodied, deeply-fingered round-shouldered and convex-sided jars, and a smaller number of fine bowls, the MBA/LBA pottery from Beddingham Villa is characteristic of the earliest of these groups. Typologically diagnostic vessels occur in six fabrics (*CF*, *SMCF*, *MCF*, *MF*, *FMF* and *SFMF*), all of which are recurrently associated on site within large and — to a varying degree — closed context groups. A grog and flint-tempered fabric, which did not occur in a typologically diagnostic form but which was associated with this group (*MFG*), may also belong to it (Figs 1–3; Tables 1 & 2). Owing to a lack of stratified context assemblages attributable to the succeeding group, which of these fabrics — if any at all — survived in use beyond the MBA/LBA remains uncertain.

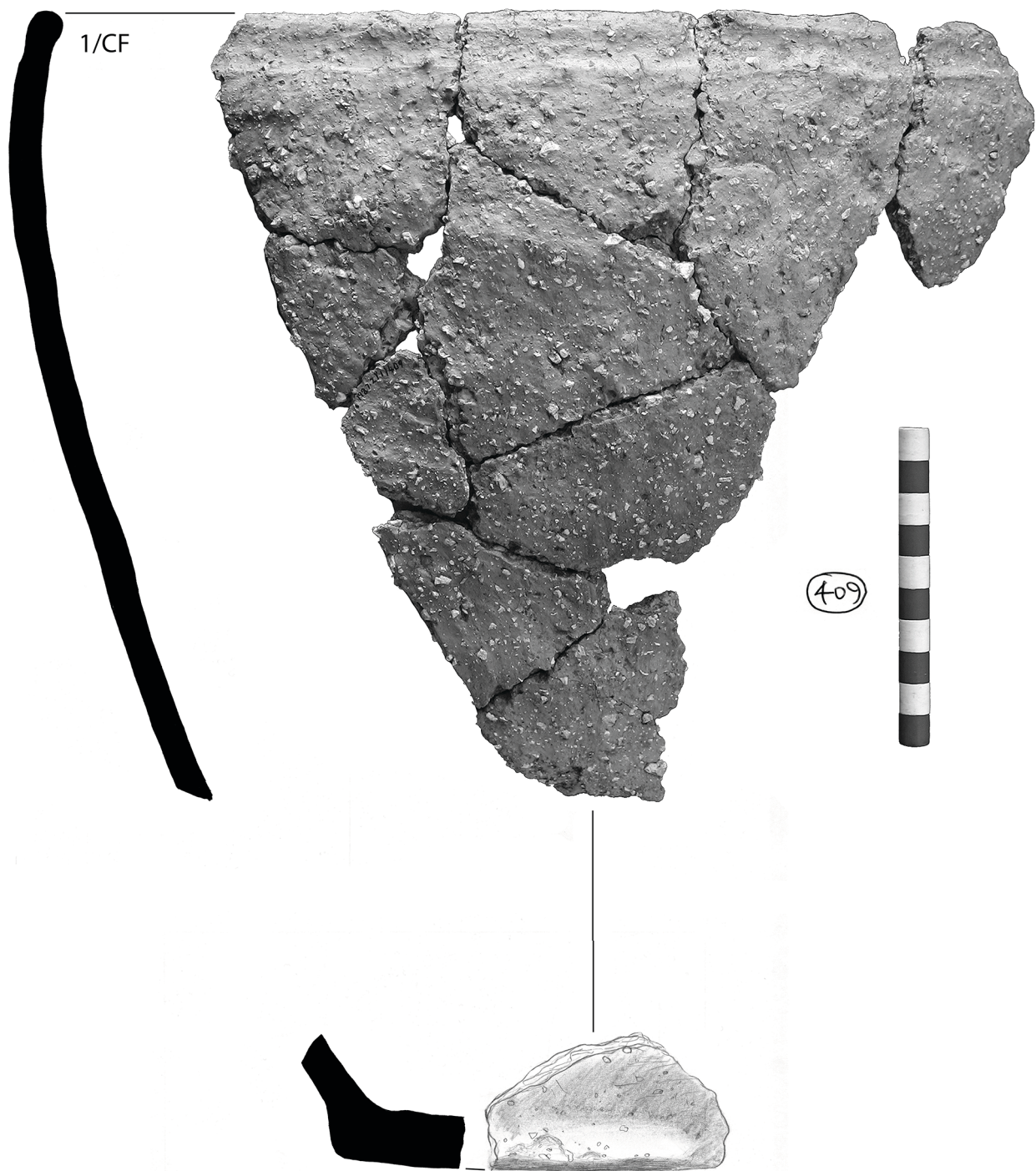
Context		Fabric and fabric date													TPQ	
		CF	SMCF	MCF	MFG	MF	FMF	SFMF	FF	SMF	MFI	SFMFI	FFI			
		Number of sherds	MBA-LBA							LBA						
cut	fill		Weight in grams													
342	343	23	0	0	59	0	53	20	0	0	0	0	0	840		
410	409	200	2300†	335†	115†	0	28	7	0	0	0	0	0	35		
422	423	4	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9		
424	425	60	0	0	343†	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	27		
426	427	2	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7		
503	504	8	0	0	34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34		
525	526	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2		
649	649	3	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19		
655	656	2	0	0	26	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	45		
657	658	12	0	0	80	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	93		
693	694	101	0	0	593†	0	91†	0	9†	0	0	0	0	0		
707	708	12	0	0	12	0	9	3	0	0	0	0	0	24		
742	744	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		
775	776	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3		
787	788	16	61†	0	0	41	41	0	0	0	0	0	0	143		
806	807	2	0	0	10	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	13		
814	815	8	0	0	155†	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	155		
841	842	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		
863	864	3	0	11	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	14		
873	874	2	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16		
1014	1015	3	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5		
1023	1024	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3		
381	382	61	0	0	187	0	281	17	0	0	4†	0	0	0		
470	229	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	4		
560	559	310	0	331†	609	0	286	109†	0	5†	137	0	0	1		1478
715	719	5	0	0	16	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	18		
722	723	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3		
984	943	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3		
TOTAL		848	0	0	828	0	636	0	0	1	139	6	2	1	2461	

**Table 2.** Pottery from contexts with Bronze Age *termini post quem*. † = illustrated feature sherd/s

Analogous pottery forms dominate the assemblage from Plumpton Plain B (Hawkes 1935), which the Beddingham MBA/LBA assemblage overlaps chronologically, and occur individually in a number of other East Sussex Late Bronze Age assemblages, such as those from Fore Down and Patcham-Fawcett, both of which yielded coarse ware convex-sided jars very similar to those from Beddingham (Seager Thomas 2008, fig. 8.9; Hamilton unpub.), but as a group it is untypical of local Late Bronze Age pottery, most of which comprises/ or is mixed with slightly later, developed post Deverel-Rimbury pottery. It also incorporates one sherd, from a fine ware bowl decorated with a chevron pattern (Fig. 2.5), which though currently unparalleled, might derive from a Deverel-Rimbury globular bowl. No doubt the identification at Beddingham of a reasonably closed early group will contribute to our understanding of these groups and thereby add to our understanding of the wider Late Bronze Age, but its immediate interest here lies less in its regional context, upon which much work remains to be done, as in its local composition. Of particular interest are the coarser fabrics, the closest local parallels for which — as a group — are not in any of the aforementioned Late Bronze Age assemblages but in the Middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury assemblages from nearby Itford Hill (Ellison 1972, 106) and Black Patch, Alciston (Drewett 1982); the aforementioned decorated fine ware sherd; and the absence from MBA/LBA contexts of Deverel-Rimbury's usual typological subjects, some of which were present on site (Fig. 4). Apart perhaps from confirming the assemblage's early LBA pedigree, this strongly suggests a degree of technological continuity between the two periods, in spite of their differing typologies. In East Sussex during the later Bronze Age, fashion led change rather than visa versa — at least in pottery production.

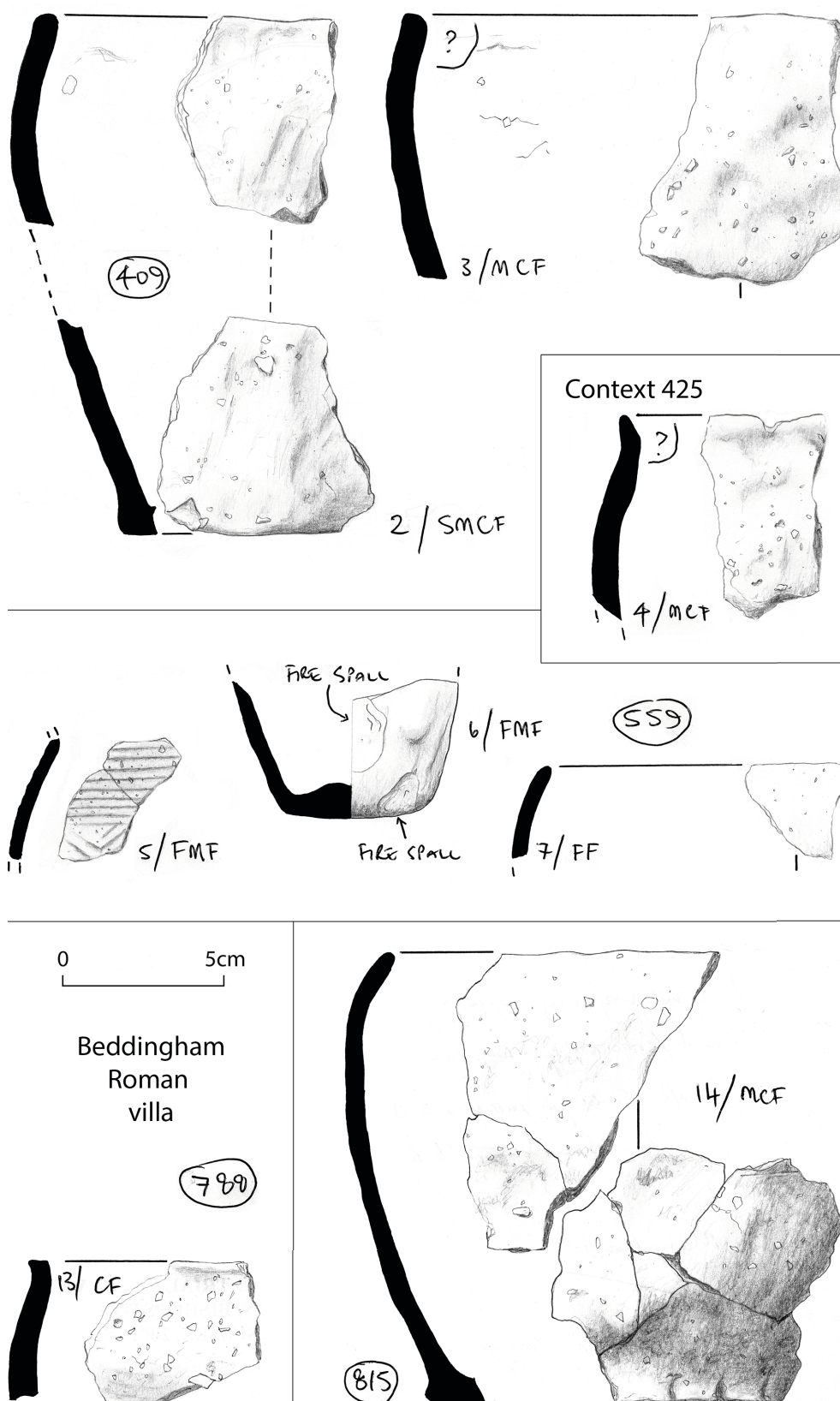
#### *On site patterning*

MBA/LBA pottery was present in small quantities throughout the excavated area but the greater part of it — including nearly all the context assemblages weighing more than 100 grams — was recovered from the south eastern rooms of the villa, just to the north of the round house and within a second, associated arc of postholes (Tables 1 & 2). This suggests an alternative, MBA/LBA date for these two feature groups. (It is acknowledged that individual postholes belonging to these structures yielded later pottery, but so did several MBA/LBA features). However the relationship of the pottery assemblage to these feature-groups and indeed to the features from which it came is not straightforward. Firstly, in terms of whole broken pots, no context assemblage or combination of context assemblages was complete, and while this may result from later truncation, the possibility has to be allowed that pottery deposition was secondary: i.e. its use as opposed to its deposition had nothing do with the features and structures with which it was associated. This interpretation is consistent with the composition of most of the context assemblages, which contained varying proportions of coarse, medium and fine pottery. Secondly, the only securely dated MBA/LBA feature in the roundhouse (fill 409)/[pit 410] contained what looks like a 'special deposit' in which pottery was associated with an unusual burnt saddle



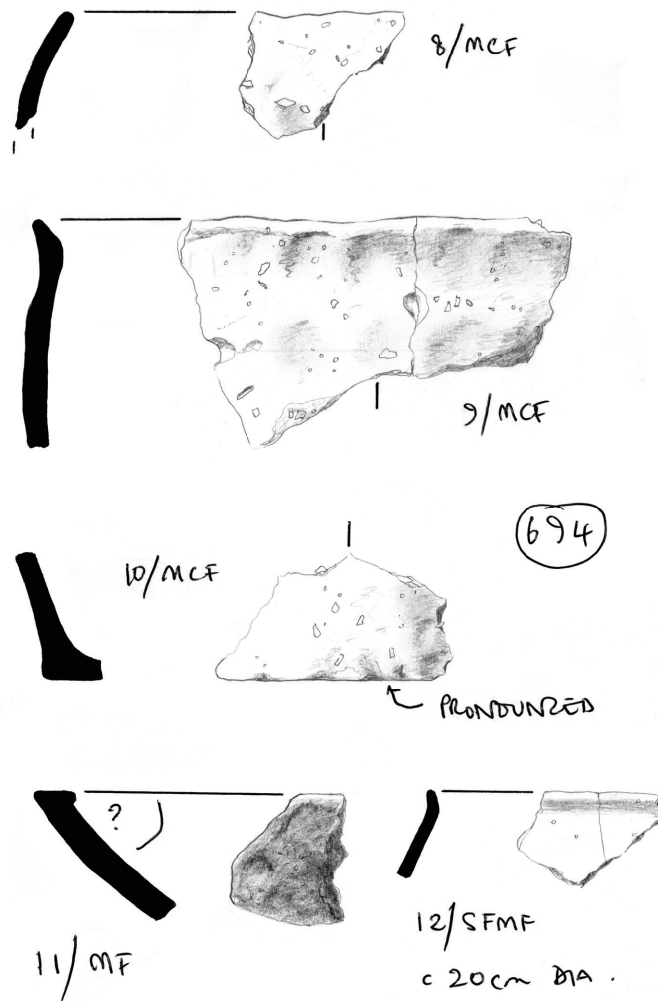
**Figure 1.** Post Deverel-Rimbury pottery (MBA/LBA)

quern of Sussex Marble and calcined human bone and need not reflect day to day activity either. A domestic module of a living and a working area *à la* Ellison (1981) is indicated, not however by the pottery itself, but by its *absence* from the roundhouse and its dating of features located within or near the adjacent arc of postholes.



**Figure 2.** Post Deverel-Rimbury pottery. MBA/LBA (nos 1, 2 and possibly 5) and LBA

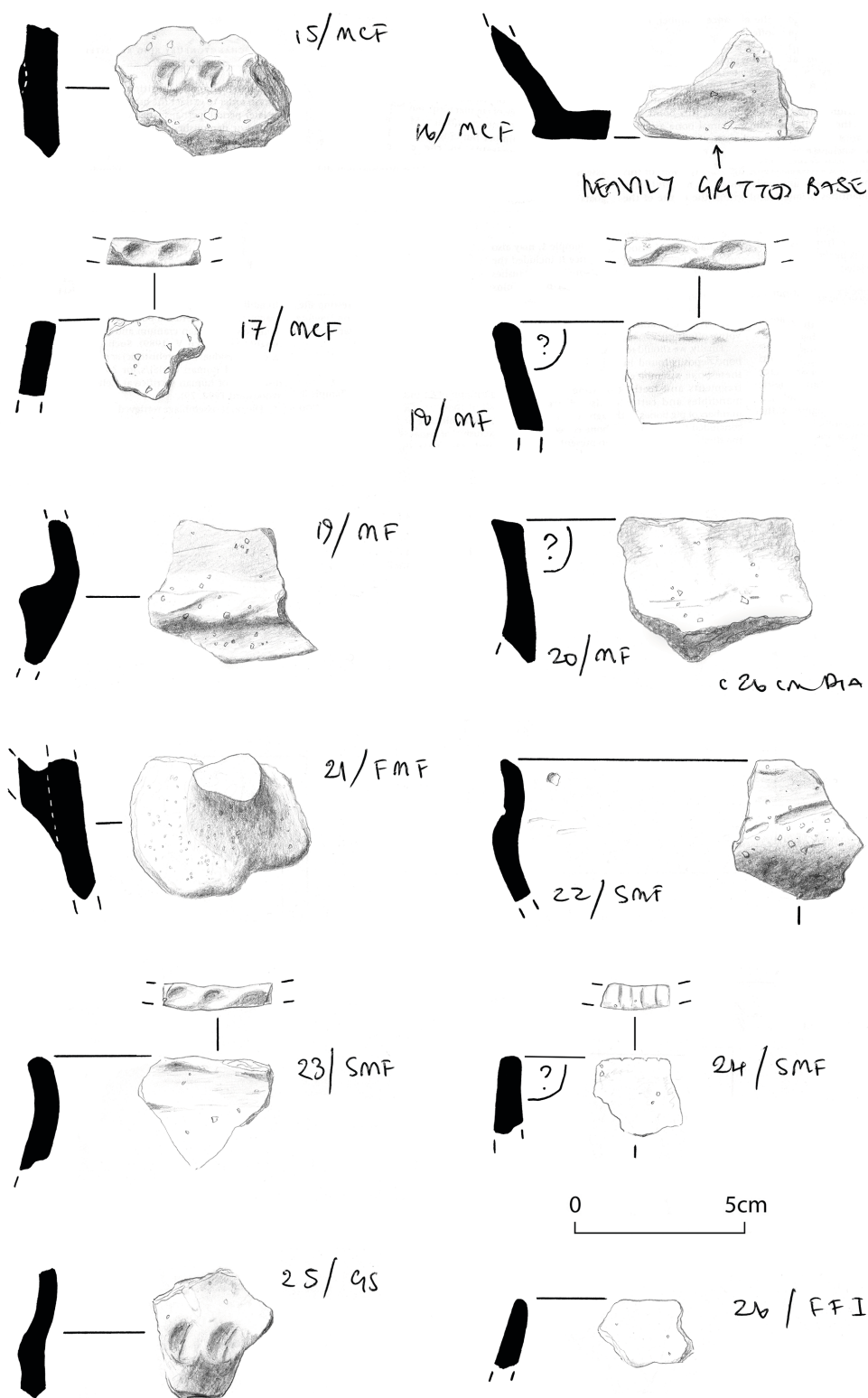




**Figure 3.** Post Deverel-Rimbury pottery (LBA)

### Late Bronze Age

The Beddingham LBA pottery group is not closed, the bulk of it having been recovered from Roman or chronologically mixed contexts, and its analysis rests to a significant extent upon analogy with data external to it. For this reason its identification should be regarded as less secure than that of the earlier assemblage. Post Deverel-Rimbury pottery from about 900 BC differs from the plainwares that characterize the Beddingham MBA/LBA pottery in two ways. Firstly, there are more vessel forms and more decoration, and, from around the Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age transition, more carinated (angular) vessels. These developments can be seen in vessels in 18–19 and 23–25 (Fig. 4). The applied neck cordon on vessel 19, for example, recalls similar features in the developed assemblage from Shinewater Park (Seager Thomas 2008). Two fine ware bowls, nos 7 and 26 (Figs 2 and 4), are also *late-ish*. Secondly, the range of fabric types and — in some areas in particular — the number of sandy fabrics increases. This trend is also evident in the Beddingham LBA assemblage, which includes four new fabrics incorporating



**Figure 4.** Residual Deverel-Rimbury (nos 15 and possibly 17 and 21) and post Deverel-Rimbury pottery (LBA and LBA/EIA)

glaucanitic (or pisolithic iron oxide) sand (*SMCFI*, *MFI*, *SFMF* and *FFI*), and a grog and shell-tempered fabric (*GS*). Vessel 26 is in *FFI*. Additionally, two

fabrics, *SMF* and *FF*, were always associated with each other or the foregoing glauconitic fabrics ([Tables 1–2](#); [Appendix 1](#)).

Locally analogous glauconitic/ iron oxide fabrics are common in decorated assemblages from the Caburn and Hollingbury (Hamilton 1984; Seager Thomas 2008, fig. 11.10–13), while slightly different shelly fabrics occur in decorated form amongst the post Deverel-Rimbury pottery from nearby Castle Hill, Newhaven (Hawkes 1939, fig. 1.3), and in direct association with a probable EIA vessel in a glauconitic/ iron oxide fabric from West Blatchington, just across the West Sussex border (Norris & Burstow 1950, vessels 9 & 11; Seager Thomas 2008, fig. 10.2 and 10.17). But though occasionally present, nowhere in Sussex, are they common either in closed plainware or developed plainware assemblages. That said, the complete absence of sharply carinated forms of the sort associated with decorated assemblages, probably rules out an EIA date for any of pottery recovered.

#### *On site patterning*

Diagnostic LBA sherds were sparser overall than diagnostic MBA/LBA sherds but like them were present throughout the excavated area. No large groups dominated by LBA material came from cut features but one came from mixed layer (126), immediately to the west of the villa. Probably therefore there was significant pottery use somewhere in the vicinity. Whether the different densities of MBA/LBA and LBA pottery on site are attributable to a focus of pottery using activity outside the area of the excavation or a lack finds traps during the later period, they suggest a pattern shifting settlement activity at Beddingham during the Late Bronze Age. By the EIA, settlement had died out or moved away completely.

### **Middle Iron Age**

Only six sherds in fabric *S*, which is exactly paralleled in the MIA assemblage from Norton in the Bishopstone Valley, are certainly MIA. There is however a partial overlap between Beddingham fabric *FFI* and Norton's MIA fabric *I* ([Table 1](#)) (Seager Thomas 2005, tab. 7) and it is *possible* that some sherds in this fabric belong to it as well. The low density of MIA pottery suggests a focus of activity outside the area of the excavation.

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**Appendix 1. Bronze and earlier Iron Age pottery from Roman and later contexts. † = illustrated feature sherd/s**

Context	Number of sherds	Fabric and fabric date													Weight in grams
		MBA													
		MBA-LBA					LBA								
													MIA		
		MCF	FMF	CF	SCF	MF	FF	SMCFI	MFI	GS	SMF	SFMI	FFI	S	
1	0	X	X	X	X	X†	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	0
3	3					X									11
15	6								X		X	X			14
16	2										X	X			4
24	6	X				X									10
34	1	X													1
35	17	X				X	X	X			X				78
37	69	X†				X		X			X	X	X		328
42	1	X													10
48	16	X				X		X	X				X		83
56	3					X		X			X				17
60	7	X	X				X		X			X			20
64	3										X	X			7
67	1											X			10
68	5								X						29
70	1					X									3
72	12	X				X		X	X		X			X	45
79	5	X				X									24
87	3	X				X			X						13
92	4								X		X				21
93	8	X				X									42
96	3										X				11
101	2								X			X			18
121	9	X				X					X		X		24
126	272	X				X		X	X		X		X		954
148	3	X				X									11
161	1							X							9
167	1								X						1
169	3	X	X												8
171	1							X							8
197	1								X						6
206	20	X				X		X	X			X			77
213	1					X									7
219	15	X			X	X			X						99
221	36														283
222	11	X				X							X	X	78
223	19	X		X		X					X		X		91
226	6	X	X												26
228	14	X				X									49
230	3					X		X							11
234	1													X	5
251	3	X							X		X				17
263	3					X			X						13
266	1					X									4
274	4	X								X†		X			19
279	1	X													1
306	2											X			8
308	1											X			1
314	42	X	X			X†			X						205
336	1	X													4
344	1								X						1
352	1	X													1
357	1					X									1
366	3	X													13

Context	Number of sherds	Fabric and fabric date								Weight in grams
		MBA								
			MBA-LBA							
						LBA-EIA				
								MIA		
367	32	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		291
391	7	X		X			X			26
392	25	X		X		X				95
399	2	X							X	5
407	3			X						17
428	1	X								9
456	1			X						2
474	2			X						6
475	2	X								6
476	1				X					14
477	1					X				2
483	2			X				X		2
493	5	X		X						53
505	7	X				X		X		34
508	2	X								3
519	6	X				X		X†		34
529	3	X		X						10
535	35	X		X	X	X		X		145
549	19	X	X	X	X	X			X†	75
550	8	X						X		28
557	2				X	X				31
573	1		X							4
593	2					X				9
597	2			X						3
604	7	X†				X			X	19
609	1		X	X						13
611	1				X					8
618	1					X				4
635	3	X	X		X					14
645	1							X		4
650	6			X						19
651	1			X						1
661	2					X			X	4
691	1							X		7
692	3	X		X						44
706	1					X				2
732	1					X				5
756	2			X						4
759	4	X*								12
772	2			X						3
827	3				X			X		5
834	5	X						X		12
837	2		X	X					X	15
857	1	X								1
861	1			X						1
862	1				X					3
868	1							X†		5
877	1	X								1
880	1			X						4
885	1				X					8
890	1				X					9
892	1			X						5
900	3	X		X						6
941	2	X				X				8
952	8		X	X						32
953	1								X	1
964	10	X		X					X	30

Context	Number of sherds	Fabric and fabric date								Weight in grams
		MBA		MBA-LBA				LBA-EIA		
									MIA	
966	1								X	3
981	1	X								8
1003	1							X		2
1012	5					X		X	X	9
1038	5			X	X	X	X			15
1040	1		X†							34
1076	1				X					1
1079	2				X			X		7
1096	2				X				X	5
1133	1				X					2
1135	1							X		4
1140	1				X					3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9325</b>									<b>4140</b>

## Appendix 2. Late Bronze Age pottery from Itford Farm.

by Mike Seager Thomas

The prehistoric pottery assemblage from Itford Farm (IFB 08) comprises 137 sherds weighing 465 grams (Table 3). All of it belongs to the post Deverel-Rimbury (*hereafter* PDR) pottery tradition, which dates to the Late Bronze Age or c. 1150–800 cal BC. The principal diagnostic features are the fabrics, of which there are two, both coarsely but sparsely flint-tempered, and half a dozen fragmentary feature sherds that best reconstruct as shouldered jars. These features are characteristic of the tradition generally and are widely paralleled in assemblages belonging to it from the region (e.g. Beddingham Villa, Glynde & Castle Hill, Newhaven). The small number of fabrics and the complete lack of evidence for decoration probably indicate a date towards the beginning of the tradition.

Up to five different vessels are represented, one from context 101, and three or four from context 5/ 113. All are fragmented (the largest sherd is only 5 cm across), incomplete, and highly weathered. This indicates either disturbance, or, the preferred view of the specialist, secondary deposition.

In so far as it fills a gap in the known distribution (both regional and contextual) of pottery belonging to the PDR tradition, the present group is an important find — there have been no other finds of PDR pottery in the immediate area; whilst the final interpretation of context 5/ 113 will undoubtedly have implications in terms of our understanding of pottery use or deposition on site (depending whether it was, or was not secondary), a recurrent theme in recent pottery analyses. However, PDR pottery itself is both fairly common and well understood locally and the research potential of a new assemblage of this size and condition is limited: bar routine fabric analysis and quantification, which would locate it within the tradition as a whole, no further work is recommended.

Context	Weight in grams	Number of sherds	Pottery date	Diagnostic features
5 top	30	11	LBA	SMCF temper of PDR type
5	285	77	LBA	SMCF temper of PDR type; out-turned rim of probable PDR shouldered jar in SMCF; possible out-turned neck of PDR shouldered jar in SMCF
10	1	1	LBA	SMCF temper of PDR type
101	1	1	LBA	FMF PDR fabric
109	1	1	LBA	Unclassifiable PDR fabric
113	147	46	LBA	SMCF temper of PDR type; fragmentary bead rim in SMCF; out-turned neck of PDR shouldered jar in SMCF

**Table 3.** Pottery from Itford Farm



Beddingham pot 1 (detail)





Beddingham pot 5



Beddingham pot 9







Beddingham pot 14





Beddingham pot 14 (detail)